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Social Movement Phenomena and the Emergence of Communities of Becoming

Robert Hershorn

The study of social movements has undergone a number of significant changes over the past four decades. This paper will begin by providing a brief overview of several noted social movement theories. In varying ways, these theoretical explorations highlighted the organizational workings of movements while neglecting to analyze agency or the role of the individual within a collectivity. It was not until the emergence of New Social Movements – and their subsequent study in the 1970s and '80s – that scholars of social movements first began to examine identity in some depth. The study of identity and how it evolves within emerging communities is necessary for understanding the latest social movement developments. These developments are a central theme of this paper and are best illustrated through the application of the notion of “becoming.” Originating with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, this concept best captures the ongoing fluidity and expansive nature of relationships between diverging social movement collectivities. The emphasis is on the continuous emergence of new connections within overlapping networks, which enhance a sense of identity and purpose for these communities.

In order to adequately contextualize how recent social movement trends are measured, I explore theoretical developments pertaining to the notion of a public sphere as a space to expand societal dialogue. Is such a space inclusive enough to contribute to wider identity development? Similarly, I examine Manuel Castells’s network theory and link it to the patterns of internetworked social movements (ISM)¹ attempting to respond to the impact of globalization. Since the early 1990s, unparalleled changes have taken place in the hegemonic relation of states to global capital. This has engendered a galvanizing solidarity among a variety of movement actors in unforeseen ways. My analysis will therefore address specific patterns that may have constrained relations among social movement actors in their attempts to address these changes. How do their actions contribute to or hamper identity development. Are they replicating the hegemonic behaviors found within the established societal structures that they claim to repudiate? Overall, I hope to provide an effective analysis that clearly captures the potential pitfalls and openings for movement actors – both theoretically and practically – in their attempt to effect change and enhance their sense of community through ephemeral networks.



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Major Social Movement Theories: An Overview

It is important to note that the various early theoretical explorations of social movement phenomena were not part of an “evolving canon” as might be common in other fields. Although many scholars who began developing these approaches were both American and from Sociology departments, there is not a linear academic thread running through the literature. What can be observed rather, is a fragmented field, with very specific modes of analysis used for each paradigm. The only exception to this pattern was during the peak of the study of New Social Movements during the 1970s. The focus on identity politics began informing earlier analyses – such as the political process and resource mobilization perspectives – that had never before placed any value on the notion of identity. This will be explored further below.

Collective Behaviour

Until the 1970s, scholars tended to view social movements within the “collective behaviour lens.” Within this discourse, actors were frequently characterized as part of a mindless mob without direction or the lucid capability to articulate their grievances. The emphasis was on how the state managed to constrain and control its citizens in order to prevent the disruption of social order, or “situations that were understood in terms of a breakdown, due to structural changes” (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 495). Throughout the literature, collective-behavior theorists provided similar descriptions of the loss of public order and the ensuing response of states to such disruption.

It is important to note however that the “collective behavior lens” focused on articulating the state’s employment of mechanisms of societal domination and the accepted means of integrating the public (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 495; Useem, 1998, p. 231; Gusfield, 1994, p. 61). This paradigm stressed that such constraints, and the previously noted inability of people to gather in a rational manner, resulted in the prevailing “strains of discontent, frustration, and aggression” (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 495).

This view did not give any credibility to individuals or collectivities attempting to challenge the state. Throughout the collective behaviour literature, no alternative views were presented which would support the collective’s capacity for effective communication or definitive goals, because only the state – not its citizens – had the capacity to clearly define what best serves the greater good. As such, it was not until the 1970s with the exploration of more elaborate approaches to the study of social movements, that academic institutions began considering the state’s position as a hegemonic force vis-à-vis divergent competing societal interests.

This shift occurred as a wide spectrum of actors from society's middle-stratum – including those in the professions and scholarly circles – attempted to accurately capture the complex phenomena inherent within social movements (Van de Bonk, 2004, p. 8). The following paradigms are indicative of the various transitions in research over the last few decades.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Within American academia in the 1970s, there was an emerging belief in a rational basis for social movement formation and related activities.² For example, Resource Mobilization Theory concentrated on exploring the gathering of resources required to galvanize movement actors and push their cause forward. Success was dependent on the capacity to gather and steer available capital and energy in order to maximize the potential of participants (Van de Bonk, 2004, p. 9). Resource Mobilization theorists emphasized the need for movement actors to effectively apply such resources within the body of a Social Movement Organization. Although there was more credibility given to the gathering of people to work toward the betterment of society – compared to the collective behavior paradigm – the individual actor was still reduced to a faceless cog within an organizational machine (Jenkins, 1983, p. 530). In this sense the literature explored the day-to-day operations and particular actions initiated by a movement as a whole, while a consideration of the unique contributions made by individuals was overlooked.

Placing the organization in the context of a catalyst for social change may have appeared progressive on the surface, but it highlighted theorists' perception – notably in the work of Gamson, Jenkins and Olson – of movement actors' underlying self-serving motives (Gamson, 1990, p. 89; Jenkins, 1983, p. 531; Olson, 1965, p. 16). There was a great degree of skepticism regarding any altruistic inclination toward a "greater good" that actors may have brought to movements. The emphasis on the organization itself within the resource mobilization paradigm also may have been a reflection of the nature of the hegemony of the state and its related corporatist structures and deep-seated modes of conduct. Marco Giugni argued that "since social movements deliver collective goods and since individuals are not likely to act to produce such goods, this perspective calls for an analysis of the selection of incentives, cost-reducing mechanisms or structures ... that lead to collective action" (Giugni, 2004, p. 149). It would appear that the organizational machinery components were most salient in the resource mobilization analysis. Giugni's statements are indicative of the fact that social movement study at this particular point in the academy found the details of operational mobilization more important than the societal change sought by movement actors. One could argue that this is a reductionist approach as the underlying reasons for mobilizing around particular causes

were frequently disregarded. Any notion of personal agency and relationships within and between movements is lost in this context. This will become more evident through further examination of the limitations of other social movement paradigms, the complexities of ISM, and the related challenges to globalization.

Frame Analysis/Meaning Construction

In the mid-1980s, sociologist David Snow and several colleagues applied Erving Goffman's frame analysis to social movement theory, positing that groups could create meaning through the identification and organization of their experiences and through subsequent action. Snow outlined the "sociopsychological processes" that would determine how movements would establish links with prospective members and form alliances with likeminded collectivities (Snow & Oliver, 1995, p. 58; Snow & Bedford, 2000, p. 614). In terms of achieving their goals, Snow indicated that groups tend to frame concerns in a manner that outlines the nature of their animosities to elite structures, present their own idealized alternative picture of reality, and delineate plans to achieve that end. William Gamson pointed to four challenges within the social-psychological direction of social movements. These included the maintenance of collective identity, solidarity, and small-scale assembly (Langman, 2005, p. 47; Morris & Braine, 2001, p. 20).

This analysis clearly goes further than Resource Mobilization Theory in terms of capturing actors as agents involved in the construction of meaning. In this regard, the theory outlined specific movement grievances and incentives for them to mobilize. These factors were believed to stimulate a sense of collective awareness, cohesion, and critical reflective "space" for actors. Therefore this gives movement members a clear sense of purpose, while roles can be continuously modified (Gamson, 1992, pp. 59, 84). Although within this framework reflexivity is recognized as an important component of modifying approaches toward change, it can be limited by a key constraint within the framing approach. The Social Movement Organization's objectives as a whole were considered of greater importance than contributions by individual actors. Success was highly determined by the impact that any movement initiative has on influencing the decision-making of those in positions of power. As Chesters & Welsh (2005) assert,

Another assumption underpinning frame analysis within social movement studies was that all social movement activity is aligned towards the prevailing political opportunity structure in an attempt to introduce new grievance foci within existing forms of nationally constituted interest representation. (p. 197)

This assumption essentializes the basis of all mobilizing activities and is at the centre of the political process approach below.

Political Process Theory

Closely related to Resource Mobilization Theory was Political Process Theory, which placed the agency of those contesting state policy directly within the hands of the state. The state essentially decided to alter the direction of policy by creating openings to further a given movement's platform. The prevailing political environment molded, and potentially hampered movements' prospective achievements. It was the political context of a given period itself – hence the label *political process* – that was critical in terms of the potential triumphs or failures of a given movement. As Langman argues, “States may have repressed, accommodated, or co-opted a movement; a movement may have encountered a power elite divided amongst itself, or a united front” (2005, p. 48). The emphasis on states as the force that ultimately determined the direction of a given movement was a key distinguishing factor between Political Process Theory and the other paradigms noted earlier.

This conceptual limitation does not place any emphasis on individual agents as active players within a given movement. As was the case in other movement theories, the focus was on collective action. The *political process* could be viewed as a “system of opportunity” that was dependent upon a favourable or unfavourable political environment; one where strategic opportunities for groups were outside of their available resources. A movement could only make gains when such an opening takes place (Tarrow, 1994, pp. 18, 85). An important example applied to this paradigm would be the political advances made by supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. Although there was greater freedom sought through internal tactics used by its supporters, the end of the Apartheid regime was ultimately a result of the tremendous economic and political pressure imposed on the country by other states. This of course led to the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the legitimization of the ANC within the South African political system.

The academic focus would begin to change with the emergence of new social movement developments. Following the increasingly vocal activities of groups who would mobilize under the banner of identity politics (explored below in the new social movement paradigm), scholars examining resource mobilization and political process theory began incorporating identity into their analyses (Buechler, 1993; Haber, 1996). Still, this increased focus on identity was within the context of how it could be mobilized or linked to collective aims (McDonald, 2006, p. 26). This focus would change as the

subject was at the centre of identity creation within the politics of New Social Movements.

New Social Movements

The diverse New Social Movements which emerged in the Western world in the 1970s and '80s were inspired by the activities of the New Left, who appeared during the previous two decades in the United Kingdom and France. The New Left consisted of young intellectuals who felt they were not represented by the social democratic parties of the day and who adamantly repudiated the political establishment (Rucht, 2004, p. 43). They attempted to carve their place in the political landscape by developing journals that featured commentary on contentious issues such as nuclear disarmament and environmental preservation. They did not, however, have broad access to the population at large as there was minimal circulation. Their reach was constrained further by the intellectual nature of the debates, which did not have the appeal of the daily coverage offered by standard circulations. Nonetheless, their activities would have a lasting effect on successive activist trends within feminist, civil rights, and indigenous movements in the coming decades (Rucht, 2004, p. 44). As important as the scholarly contributions to emerging social movements were, the distinguishing factors of the orientation of actors who mobilized at this time must be emphasized. Prior to this period, social mobilizations generally centred on issues of class, such as labour grievances voiced through unions. Groups that were detrimentally impacted by the exclusionary practices of societal institutions wanted to be afforded equitable treatment within such bodies.

New social movement activity extended beyond issues of class-consciousness as mobilization began to take place under the banner of identity. Forms of representation – both collective and individual – were the central issues for these movements. As Eduardo Canel (1992) asserted, identity for new social movement actors,

was not constituted by their place at the level of production. Their primary concern was not with economic issues but with collective control of the process of symbolic production and the redefinition of social roles. They raised non-class issues related to gender, ethnicity, age ... the environment, and peace. (p. 190)

Along with symbolic production, the acceptance of personal differences amongst members helped transform the role of activists and distanced them from previous movements. New social movement objectives differed substantially as well. Rather than wanting to transform the existing power

structures, actors within new social movements were interested in being included in them. This objective was balanced with an unprecedented approach to mobilization. They insisted on the “refusal of any centralized hierarchy, leaders or spokespeople” (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 86). These trends can be observed in the decision-making process within many of the recent Alternative Globalization Movements (AGM).³ Prior to exploring these developments, it is instructive to critically evaluate the potential of the public sphere as a space to expand societal discourse. It is important to draw on theoretical developments within this particular scholarly paradigm, as actors within contemporary social movements can be viewed as entering public channels of communication that seek to broaden societal debate to include their perspective; one which they view as crucial to expanding the collective good. This leads to questions about the inclusivity of the public sphere. What lessons could be applied to the study of social movements relating to both the constraints and potential openings within this sphere?

A Closer Look at the Public Sphere

The ideals of open participation in public discourse were reflected in Habermas’s notion of the public sphere. Habermas (2006) describes the *bourgeois public sphere* as the, “sphere of private individuals assembled into a public body, which almost immediately laid claim to the officially regulated ‘intellectual newspapers’ for use against the public authority itself” (p. 75). In these publications and related journals, this group “debated that public authority on the general rules of social intercourse in their fundamentally privatized yet publicly relevant sphere of labour and commodity exchange” (2006, p. 75). In theory, this open discursive forum outside of the dominant economic and political power structures was meant to disregard class, placing emphasis on the persuasiveness of the arguments of those who attended.

Similar to the theoretical limitations regarding the place of the individual within the aforementioned social movement paradigms, the public sphere in reality was a greater reflection of emerging patterns of bourgeois domination than an early attempt at working toward broader societal inclusion. Critical scholars categorized the public sphere as an “institutional vehicle” leading toward “a shift from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one” (Fraser, 1993, p. 8). Nancy Fraser, in her work entitled “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” expresses the need to delve deeper into the nature of societal dynamics and related discourse, which emerged in the bourgeois public sphere. The form of debate was indicative of hierarchical inequalities. Those less versed in elitist “bourgeois norms” – such as ways of “appropriately” articulating one’s point – were placed at a serious

disadvantage. In this sense, the public sphere, with its emphasis on being an open space for dialogue, was actually a guise for a coercive forum that exercised group dominance. Those outside of the bourgeoisie became victimized by this contradiction, as they were unable “to expose modes of deliberation that mask domination” (Fraser, 1993, p. 9).

This directly applies to contemporary stratified societies. Fraser argues that there can never be equal participation within this public sphere, but rather the dynamic is one of hegemony where marginal groups are absorbed “into a false ‘we’ that reflects the more powerful” (Fraser, 1993, p. 14). The attempt of those on the periphery to articulate their concerns is therefore lost somewhere by the very nature of this dialogue.

For the purposes of this paper it is important to contextualize any notion of public sphere with trends in anti-globalization activity over the past several years. Can the latest developments in *internetworked* movement activity contribute to shifting this debate from the encroaching hegemony of dominant classes? Have recent movement actions facilitated through sophisticated technology created a need to modify Fraser’s analysis, thereby legitimizing a “valid we,” which includes groups that have been attempting to move beyond the margins of their respective societies. What are the implications related to identity development for groups involved in these movements? This will be explored below when examining the diverse social movement networks which have emerged as a result of globalization trends. Several scholars have argued that the theoretical scope of the public sphere must be enhanced based on these multifaceted trends.

Before pursuing this further, however, it is important to consider the motivations of actors who have mobilized in recent years. Their causes are directly linked to changes in the international financial system. Firstly, with global neoliberalism, members of the governing and industrial elite have pushed for the further liberalization of markets. The multilateral system through organs such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, has been used by those in power to “legitimize” the further concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. This trend includes *Southern* countries devaluing their currency in an attempt to compete for/host transnational corporations; the benefit of such mobility for the latter is the advantage of not adhering to strict labour or environmental standards and the potential of accruing more profit through lower wage levels (Bandow & Vazquez, 1994, p. 3). These trends have exacerbated tensions between marginalized groups and the most powerful.

Clearly the current mobility of capital motivates the oldest social movement actors – namely labour groups. This phenomenon has also rekindled the causes of those who have assembled to champion new social movements. A key example is the challenge to the rights of indigenous people who have been placed in a position to fight widespread attempts to appropriate their land for use in industrial projects.

At the 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, computer-mediated communication was used both to organize demonstrations and immediately report back to movement partners and outside observers as to the dynamics of events that were taking place in “real time.” This event was characterized as a watershed in the mobilization of protesting actors. It could be argued that the unprecedented use of electronic communication revolutionized the way social protest operated.

The Indymedia Movement was at the forefront of this innovative application of technology. Older social movement actors now had partners in a new generation; one that had begun utilizing the most sophisticated means available to reinvent the nature of protest. As Jeffrey S. Juris asserts, this assembly managed to capture “the imagination of long-time activists and would-be postmodern revolutionaries alike” (2004, p. 194). It is important to consider the impact that these developments have on the potential of the public sphere.

If we are to attempt to place the Internet somewhere on the public sphere spectrum – between notions of idealized inclusiveness and a space for hegemonic bourgeois dominance – then another extensive debate is engendered. As Fraser argued, in reality the public sphere was less of a forum of inclusion than a means to exercise the will of those interested in attaining societal dominance. Perhaps in line with other technologies that were viewed as mechanisms designed to emancipate people from the challenges of modern life, the Internet has been perceived with great optimism in many circles as a liberating device. The ability to communicate has been enhanced considerably as information flows faster than ever before. This line of thought is limited for a number of reasons. Lee Salter’s analysis of the Internet’s place within public sphere debates echoes Fraser’s contextualization. He argues that the “Bourgeois public sphere sought to form a common will, whereas the internet seems to fragment or at least question the idea of universality or common interest, facilitating precisely the opposite – pluralism – may be evidence enough of the dissimilarities” (Salter, 2003, p. 122). It could be argued that the diversity of actors and ideas in the social movement landscape today would not exist without the Internet. Perhaps the technology can be viewed as a facilitating mechanism for an alternative

public sphere; one that extends beyond the scope of what Salter is attempting to reconcile.

Still, to position the Internet as a tool within an alternative open public sphere, may also be problematic. Any attempt to capture the multitude of diverse voices circulating around cyberspace and to determine their impact on social change would require years of study. This effort would also be hampered by changes to this form of media through corporate endeavors to commercialize it, therefore constraining the free flow of information. Perhaps framing alternative globalization movements in the context of a network more aptly captures their relationships with one another and the nature of their unique development.

Networks and Alternative Globalization Movements

Manuel Castells describes the network society as a social configuration consisting of networks linked by the most advanced fiber optic technology to facilitate information flows. Castells categorizes such a configuration “in organizational arrangements of humans in relations of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture” (2004, p. 3). At the centre of the network are interlinked nodes that enhance its significance by drawing in pertinent information and transmitting it more effectively. He refers to this information as “flows” which pass through the connecting streams linking each node (Castells, 2004, p. 3).

There may be oppositional networks, or those that work together for mutually beneficial ends. The AGM networks attempt to continuously diversify in order to find new ways to draw attention to, and subvert the power of, the incredibly intricate hegemony of neoliberal networks. As noted above, the Seattle protests demonstrated the sophistication of the Internet and other methods of computer-mediated communication in terms of relaying information immediately to movement partners in the former's network. The Indymedia Movement has continued to use their unique system of open source software and open publishing in an attempt to expand their network and orient themselves in ways that do not reflect the hierarchical structures of the neoliberal economy. While corporate software works within the confines of copyright law, the Indymedia community has the freedom to use, alter or enhance the program under what has been termed “copyleft.” Open source software is complemented by open publishing, where users can post original writing or respond to other users' observations (Stallman, 1999; Arnison, 2001). Therefore, this creative freedom – which contributes to community identity development – is at the centre of ISM involvement in subversive

activities. For this reason, Lauren Langman argues that the use of computer-mediated communication facilitates “virtual public spheres,” unprecedented types of “fluid networks” and a gathering of actors – within a diverse nodal system – that directly applies to Castells’s characterization of modern networks. Rather than being a part of formal structures – akin to the social movement organizations of the past – these new formations more appropriately reflect Castells’s flows (Langman, 2005, p. 46).

These flows transmit the latest information related to a given group’s cause, enabling movement leaders to more thoroughly consider future actions. This material would often include reports about the activities of neoliberal actors infringing on an area of concern that the former is attempting to address. Such communication flows within the network often include the circulation of collective opinions and the development of collaborative strategies. Perhaps this dynamic more than any other may contribute to re-opening the public sphere debate by highlighting the mushrooming of “cyber-fora” in recent years. This method of communicating ideas is also incredibly inexpensive. In the past when movement actors wanted to produce newsletters or distribute their work beyond a certain geographic location, the costs impeded the capacity of such movements to reach potential partners (Langman, 2005, p. 48). In addition, the production process is considerably less time-consuming today as so many partners are all linked somewhere along a network path to assist in the development of any informational product.

ISM also act as disseminators of information to provide their version of events to interested observers the world over. There is no way to predict who will be absorbing such information and how outsiders might be influenced – potentially leading to the involvement of more actors. Militancy is not the only expanded path woven along network lines. The diversities of sites and trajectories have linked a multitude of players in cyberspace:

Decentralized nodules along communication networks are easily created, constructed, and rhizomatically spread to deterritorialized “virtual public spheres” – cyber salons, cafes, and meeting places in cyberspace where people and information intersect in virtual communities or subcultures. (Langman, 2005, p. 55)

This reality is only enhanced by the number of computer-mediated communication devices used by individuals to relay such information informally – in this sense the electronic tactics of Seattle have morphed into commonplace interactions producing new meaning for diverse communities.

These interactions have led scholars such as Langman to re-evaluate their conceptualization of social movement phenomena. “Cyberconnections” have opened doors for activists, providing space for them to be more detached from relationships of domination within their own societies thereby enhancing a sense of identity within these virtual communities. It should be noted however that not all actors have adequate resources to contribute their voices electronically to critical movement concerns. Nonetheless, the productive developments within ISM phenomena have captured the academy’s attention. Langman’s use of the term “rhizome” and the AGM’s post-structuralist implications have been echoed by other scholars. Chesters and Welsh place these rhizomatic interactions within Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming,” which they define as “a process of symbiosis, the connection of heterogeneous elements into new assemblages with emergent properties” (Chesters & Welsh, 2005, p. 188; Deleuze & Guattari, 2002, p. 55). This involves a process of self-exploration where challenging neoliberalism has led to emerging cultures or new forms of identity for these evolving actors. As noted above, creativity is the central essence of this new connectivity.

This has direct implications for identity development along cyber pathways. Limiting movements to their political activities would be ignoring a considerable amount of communication taking place between actors, which contributes to the evolution of identities. Alberto Melucci has been very critical of the absence of identity analysis in social movement scholarship within “submerged networks” during times of latency (Melucci, 1996, p. 77). These periods are filled with activities and dialogue which provide a great deal of insight into actors immersed in AGM. It is important to assess the non-symmetrical relationship between past social movement scholarship and its implications for movement dynamics within the AGM.

Today’s rhizomatic connections have created innumerable opportunities for movement actors to develop ideas and establish relationships. Chesters and Welsh contribute to this emerging scholarship and complement the network model by borrowing again from Deleuze and Guattari. They apply the concept of *plateaux* – contextualized within the diverse groupings of actors linked in multidirectional ways within a network – to the emerging collective awareness developed through these unique connections (Deleuze & Guattari, 2002, p. 55). The *plateaux* involve a process of “reflexive framing to address the iterative process of renegotiating meanings” (Chesters & Welsh, 2005, p. 194). The significance of this process is vast, as it places all AGM actors in a very specific evolutionary pattern of becoming:

The “object” of analysis becomes the iterative character and fractal patterning of overlapping networks, and the processes of interaction and exchange between global locales, the relationship between the virtual and the real, and the interaction between new social actors and familiar forces of antagonism. (Chesters & Welsh, 2005, p. 194)

The networks by their very nature accommodate change. This “transitional fluidity” impacts the composition of interconnected movements, leading to continuously shifting identities.

In this paradigm, group actualization is dependent on the actions of their members who contribute to the creation of fluid identities. Computer-mediated communication facilitates the redirection of patterns of becoming; bridging the foundation built by the actions of actors within older movements to the contemporary requirements of AGM. Current action includes social fora and anti-war and anti-globalization demonstrations, where people have cumulatively gathered in unprecedented numbers.⁴ Therefore “real time” and the virtual are contributing to unprecedented levels of becoming as more and more people are engaged with negotiating meaning. Although there are a number of people who do not have the privilege of access to communication technologies,⁵ the amount of “rhizomatic connections” that have taken place have led to a significant reorganization of social movement activities and relationships. This process is significant and needs to be viewed in the context of the orientation that actors bring to their movement activities. How does this differ from their predecessors’ approach prior to our globalized, wired world?

Contemporary Social Movement Actors: Working Toward Change or Replicating Hegemonic Relations?

Actors within social movements may view the structures they are opposing as oppressive forces, which disregard the needs of the majority, while being solely concerned with the narrow objectives of the few. Such “agents for social change” may consider themselves to be uniquely uncorrupted by virtue of the fact that they are working toward healing global inequities. Without their efforts, who would attempt to redress these imbalances? One could argue, however, that it is self-defeating to place oneself in a binary relationship with a dominating societal force. Within such a posture, how are actors within movements relating to one another? Are they treating their colleagues with the respect that their cause requires to effect change? Or, has the binary relationship between a movement and the hegemonic force it opposes led to a fragmented organizational structure, where individuals

within it abuse positions of authority and end up playing a dominating role themselves? Richard J.F. Day attempts to answer these questions in his book, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. He paraphrases Caitlin Hewitt-White's argument by asserting that,

There seems to be an assumption at work that if we are fighting "the system" that is oppressive, then we are somehow "non-oppressive" by virtue of claiming to be "outside" of the system. None of us are immune from the grasp of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia. The implications of thinking that we are immune can dangerously affect the participation of systematically oppressed peoples in the movement. (Day, 2005, p. 197)

This statement is a clear indication that we need to approach any analysis of the AGM–ISM with caution. When carrying out field research, Day discovered that many actors have been on the receiving end of patriarchal or racist practices among movements that are believed to be the most evolved (2005, pp. 197–199). That is, those that have set precedents in terms of "transformative" tactical strategies toward change. Although there are many valuable developments along identity lines taking place between networked actors, there are also interactions – both on-line and in-person – which are reminders of what is yet to be achieved. The breadth of the AGM and their relationship to globalization presents us with an important opportunity to assess such interactions. A common orientation calls for a "hegemony from below" designed to oppose the dominating neoliberal system. Day asserts that such a posture "is to remain within the logic of neoliberalism; it is to accept ... the hegemony of hegemony" (2005, p. 8). This mentality is anchored in a view of social transformation that can only be realized collectively through state or transnational structures. Such a focus distorts the very nature of the conduct of states which attempt to perpetuate economic growth in order to maintain their position within the global system.

All too often, relationships of power become part of the fabric of many social movements. John Holloway (2002) in his book, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*, echoes Day's point on hegemonic relations when he argues that,

The struggle has an aim: to conquer political power. The struggle is a means to achieve that aim. Those elements of struggle which do not contribute to the achievement of that aim are either given secondary importance or must be

suppressed altogether: a hierarchy of struggles is established.
(p. 17)

In this sense, movements are defeated from the outset when power relations override any idealistic objectives that may have inspired certain actors. Colleagues tend not to see the extent to which related organizational dynamics have been infused with power. Replications of a vertical corporate decision-making style, found within established state structures – as opposed to a horizontal, collectivist one – begin materializing within movements that claim to subvert the former. In this regard, although members may perceive themselves devoting their energies toward “revolutionary change,” they are very often reproducing a hierarchy. Holloway captures this dynamic well when he argues that, “the hierarchisation of struggle is a hierarchisation of our lives and thus a hierarchisation of ourselves” (2002, p. 17). How did such personal and collective fragmentation ever become a part of movements claiming to be committed to redressing structural inequalities?

This is primarily why Holloway emphasizes that the central concern is not who is controlling the reigns of power but the presence of power relationships, period. Many contemporary actors have transcended this orientation as their networks have provided them with opportunities to actualize non-hegemonic rather than counter-hegemonic activities, relationships, and goals. One could argue that the previously noted cross-fertilization of ideas through computer-mediated communication within ISM is a key example of productive non-hegemonic activity. The actualization of productive efforts among movement actors dissolves power relationships by enabling the materialization of alternatives that contribute to movement goals (Day, 2005, p. 8; Holloway, 2002, p. 17). Again, at the centre of this approach is creativity, or perhaps a “creative becoming.” The application of creative processes, which transcend hegemonic relations, has direct implications for movement identities.

Perhaps a window into this type of identity reconstitution emerging through ISM can be found within the work of Giorgio Agamben and his ideas of “coming community.” He created an identification known as “whatever being” that could apply to the ongoing exchange between social movement actors, which contributes to identity creation. This does not entail distinctiveness or collectiveness, but rather an autonomous entity that demonstrates its autonomy. “Whatever being” essentially enables communities to oppose conventional societal norms that attempt to bring order to their lives. He argues that this way of being “breaks us out of the societies of discipline and control, and urges us to create our own autonomous spaces” (Day, 2005, p. 180). There are plenty of opportunities

both through computer-mediated communication and face-to-face initiatives for actors within social movements to benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas within networked spaces. How are actors using their agency however? Are they being driven by a sense of obligation to act morally?

Agamben has asserted that “whatever being” does require groups of individuals to respond in this manner as situations occur which call on them to “rise to the occasion.” What emerges are singularities or new forms of identity found somewhere on the spectrum between distinctiveness and collectiveness. On another level, Agamben asserts that the state is completely intolerant of the “singularities” that “form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging” (1993, p. 85). The potential for actors to form such a community certainly presents an alternative to the power dynamics or “hegemony of hegemony” characterized by Day and Holloway in many social movements. If the elite in the public and private sectors are still perpetuating their power through domestic and multilateral channels, then how are they really impacted by any “coming community” made up of individuals who simply “belong”?

The terminology used to express Agamben’s vision is also problematic considering the realities of those who mobilize. How can the singular entity of community be used when there are divergent movements attempting to address numerous issues? Day argues that, “rather than longing for total communion, we must understand communities as multiplicities that cannot be totalized, as n-dimensional networks of networks that spread out indefinitely and are indefinitely connected” (2005, p. 182). There is also a polarity created within Agamben’s argument, where a battle between humanity on one hand and the state on the other is unfolding. As noted above, there are instances where activists who claim to be contributing to the betterment of humanity replicate pervasive hegemonic relationships associated with the state. Perhaps exploring forms of direct action will provide practical examples relating to identity development within and between movements that will more clearly place Agamben’s abstract notions.

Affinity Groups and the Potential of Direct Action

Affinity groups first appeared during the civil rights movement and drew particular attention at the height of anti-nuclear campaigns in the 1970s and ’80s. They consisted of several mini-groups of individuals who were committed to assist one another during demonstrations in moments when their actions would precipitate a violent response from police officers. These groups would assemble strategically in specific locales with each collectivity

having a representative who would partake in “spokescouncils” (McDonald, 2006, p. 45). These spokescouncils would address areas of concern related to unfolding developments and take it upon themselves to negotiate these matters with authorities. Affinity groups were not only a means of coordinating movement activity, they “became a principle around which a community was to be organized” (McDonald, 2006, p. 45). This shift in focus has great significance as it represents continuity between the social movements of the last decades of the twentieth century and their AGM counterparts. This method of organizing was very successful in Seattle and other major demonstrations since then. Its appeal is universal, as the spokescouncil resonates with diversities within a network, often leading to solidarity between people of varying political beliefs and geographic locations (Day, 2005, p. 35). The affinity group provides opportunities for a movement to enhance their internal environment whereby contentious interpersonal issues can be remedied through open discussion.

Still, just as there are limitations to the more conceptual notion of “coming community,” the affinity group method of direct action is not a panacea. Although there is a great deal of movement growth that takes place, there is a strong emphasis on extensive discussions to resolve issues. This limits the agency of affinity groups in general as major AGM demonstrations involve the coordination of many different clusters potentially leading to ceaseless discussions. The amount of time and energy involved is not a formula for effective decision-making (Jordan, 2002, p. 71; McDonald, 2006, p. 45; Day, 2005, p. 35). It may be helpful to contextualize affinity group developments as part of an iterative process which can be modified over time.

Conclusion

Ideas that transcend both idioms and practices of hegemony inform social movements in a constructive way. Such movements that do not seek to replicate hegemonic structures have provided openings for likeminded activists to build upon. Although Agamben’s vision of “coming community” is flawed, it does shed light on the potential of individuals to bring a unique perspective to movements as one of many “singularities,” thus building a sense of identity within movements. Similarly, affinity groups have certainly made some progress in the exchanges that occur when spokescouncils consult with one another at major AGM gatherings. Other subversive tactics have emerged among activists in recent years such as “haktivism” – or computer manipulated hacking for political ends – and culture jamming. The latter is “an attempt to reverse and transgress the meaning of cultural codes whose primary aim is to persuade us to buy something or be someone” (Jordan, 2002, p. 102). These approaches have respectively contributed to hampering

flows in the neoliberal order by disrupting corporate and governmental computer networks and staging events which have garnered considerable publicity. Whether they add to the formation of broader communities through the “constructive agency” of singularities is debatable. They certainly provide audiences with an opportunity to critically engage with a society that often deflects people away from reflection through continuous popular culture spectacles.

Computer-mediated communication has enabled movements to gauge their progress by relaying information at an unprecedented rate, perhaps contributing to the modification of approaches for future endeavours. The relatively novel phenomenon of social fora provides opportunities to discuss such practices in person and learn from past experiences. The motivations for movements to mobilize today must be rooted in a flexible identity politics, so that there can be a reconciliation with the ongoing application of modified universal strategies. What is the advantage of groups dismissing such openings, which continue to be appropriated and applied to movement endeavours?

Lauren Langman has been very critical of colleagues who fail to recognize the dramatic transformations that have necessitated revisiting social movement theory. He argues that there is an endemic pattern among scholars who voluntarily limit their analysis based on what he terms, “grant-funded empiricism” (Langman, 2005, p. 70). These are the same researchers who for years would not move beyond the constraints of viewing social movements in terms of resource mobilization or capturing the action of collectivities simply in terms of waiting for the opportunity to re-direct their objectives into the establishment’s political arena. The legacy of this academic analysis is further challenged by the fact that both networks and social movements themselves are ephemeral phenomena. Movement objectives must therefore be measured incrementally. Special attention could perhaps be paid to a particular movement’s projected goals and how their activities attempt to address them.

Potential outcomes notwithstanding, mapping developments in social movements has become considerably easier. This is due to a recent trend of academics either being directly involved with social movements while they are producing related work on the latter’s practices, or scholars being granted funding to study the latest AGM phenomena. Day, Holloway, Chesters, and Welsh represent less than a handful of academics that currently fall into one of the two categories. This reality assists us in our understanding of the delicate balance between a movement’s progress and the perpetuation of hegemonic relations. Still it is important to consider such circumstances

within the context of the brief timeline of the latest social movement developments, which are less than a decade old. Whether they continue to learn from each other in terms of the progress reached in practices of direct action and intra/inter-movement dynamics toward relations of respectful affinity remains to be seen.

Notes

1. Lauren Langman, in his article, “From Virtual Public Spheres to Global Justice: A Critical Theory of Internetworked Social Movements” uses the term Internetworked Social Movements (ISM) to capture the vast network of current struggles against globalization. He later defines such struggles broadly as alternative globalization movements (Langman, 2005, p. 44).
2. The term “rational” appears often in the resource mobilization literature. It is used in relation to the activity of actors within the organizational operation of movements.
3. Lauren Langman, in his article, “From Virtual Public Spheres to Global Justice: A Critical Theory of Internetworked Social Movements” uses the term Alternative Globalization Movements (AGM) to capture the diverging movements that have responded to the threat of globalization (Langman, 2005, p. 44).
4. The February, 2003 anti-Iraq War protests held simultaneously in cities across the world is a key example.
5. Those without access to communication technologies have been considered marginalized by the “digital divide.” This division encompasses the split between developing and developed countries, but could also include discrepancies between the rich and poor within the latter. It also has implications for education pertaining to adequate levels of knowledge of the English language (Norris, 2001, p. 4).

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